

Hot Corn. A SKETCH IN NEW YORK.

BY MRS. E. F. POSTER.

"Here's your nice hot corn, smoking hot, smoking hot, just from the pot!"

"How after hours, last evening, as we sat over the desk, this cry came up in a soft, plaintive voice under the window, which told us of one of the ways of the poor to eke out the means of subsistence in this overburdened, ill-fed, and worse-lodged home of misery."

"We discovered the owner of the hot corn cry, in the person of an emaciated little girl, about twelve years old."—*N. Y. Tribune.*

With dizzy whirl, on rushed the wheels
Along the city's murky street,
And music's light inspiring peals
Rang out from folly's gay retreat,
And busy footsteps hurried past,
And human voices, harsh and wild
Commingling, floated on the blast;
When the shrill accents of a child
Rose mid the din, in tones forlorn,
And cried, "Come buy hot corn, hot corn!"

Like some sad spirit wailed by,
A stranger to the ways of earth,
Came up that little plaintive cry:
Sweet discord to the sounds of mirth.
Unheeded by the reckless crowd,
There stood a girl, a pale, wan thing,
And 'neath her bosom's latticed shroud,
There lurked an age of suffering;
While 'e'en till night approached the morn,
In feeble voice, she cried, "Hot corn!"

The gas-lamp's glare fell on her face,
But lighted not her languid eyes;
And down her pallid cheeks, the trace
Of tears, bespeaking her miseries;
With hunger gnawing at her heart,
She shivered, as the light-wind blew
Her soiled and ragged clothes apart;
Till all insensible she grew,
Then sinking in unblest sleep,
Forgot to cry, "Hot corn!" and weep.

Alone, so young, how came she there?
To sell hot corn so late at night;
Had she no friends, no home, no where
To rest, and hide her from the sight
Of the rude world? No mother? Hush!
That holy name is not the one
For Katy's parent. Woman! bluish
For thy lost sisters, break to own
That thou canst ever fall so low,
To plunge thy children into woe.

Within that mother's heart, the light
Of love was quenched, quench'd by the flood,
The dawning flood, whose waters blight
All that is left of human good;
And in her breast that demon reigned,
Who "Give, give, give!" is ever crying;
Demanding still to be maintained,
While all within, around, is dying;
Outpouring in its baneful breath,
Destruction, sorrow, sin and death.

The lips which should have kiss'd away
Her daughter's tears, dealt curses forth;
The hand which should have been her stay,
Was but the minister of wrath;
Blind to her wants, deaf to her prayers,
Regardless of the driving storm,
To open streets and midnight air,
She drove that little shivering form
To such a dram! In shame and scorn
With lamished lips to cry "Hot corn!"

"Hot corn, hot corn," night after night,
More faint and feeble grew that voice—
Still fiercely burned each glaring light,
Still music made the town rejoice;
The countless footsteps pass along,
Up came the wild, discordant tones,
The voices of the thoughtless throng,
The bounding wheels rolled o'er the stones—
But midst the din, the rush, the roar,
Poor Katy's cry is heard no more.

In one of those dark, noisome cells,
The wretched call their home, she lies
All motionless; the icy spells
Of death have closed those weary eyes;
She speaks not now. Alas! how drear!
That calm, reproachful silence, when
Beside the wronged and injured dead,
We kneel in vain! Low in that den,
Behold the stricken mother cower;
Grown sorer in one fearful hour.

She calls her "Katy darling!"—peers
Into that pale and anken face.
She battles with soulless brow with tears,
Sees on those bruised limbs, the trace
Of her own cruelty;—again
She calls and prays for one last word
Of blest forgiveness—all in vain.
The answering voice no more is heard.
The soulless clay alone is there,
And fell remorse, and dark despair.

Weep, wretched woman, weep! That face
Shall haunt thee to thy dying day;
Nor time from memory erase
Thy child's deep wrongs, for they
Shall search into thy guilty breast;
In mad excitement thou shalt hear
Her cries; and midst thy fitful rest,
Shall that pale phantom form appear,
And o'er thy drunken moping, stand
To curse thee with an outstretched hand.

Yet not alone with thee, abide
That curse. Oh! Men and Christians! can
Ye robe yourselves in god-like pride,
And boast your land, the one where man
Is most exalted; yet permit
The demon Drunkenness to roam
Unfettered through your streets; to sit
By every corner, every home—
The weak and wretched to allure
To drink, to suffer, and endure.

In mercy, then, arrest the reign
Of this dread fiend; and oh! protect
Man from his self-inflicted pain;
Spare the young wife, whose hopes are wreck'd,
Whose heart is crushed, whose home forsaken,
Whose life's a desolated wild,
To infant prayers and tears awaken,
And from the mother save the child.
Hark to the echo!—Save, oh, save!
Pleads a sad voice from Katy's grave.

The best of men are sometimes short. We know a clergyman who is not over three feet, and a deacon who never has a sixpence about him.

The Temptation.

BY MAY MEADOWS.

"Look thou not upon the wine when it is red. At last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder."—*PROVERBS.*

"Mary, he stands upon a fearful brink," said Edith Werner, as she clasped the hand of her friend. "I cannot calmly see him pursue the downward path, without one word from you to check him in his career."

"Why, Edith, how serious you are," said Mary Ellis, with a light laugh. "What effect would all I can say have upon him? and besides, I apprehend no danger in his taking a little generous wine."

"He who raises the wine-cup to his lips once," said Edith, solemnly, "is in danger. However cautiously he treads that mazy path, he will find a stinging serpent amid the flowers."

"Could you bear to see him going the way of the inebriate, and at last lying in the drunkard's loathsome grave? Oh! Mary, think seriously of these things before it is too late."

"If I could see the peril you fear, Edith, I confess it would give me great sorrow; but no," said Mary, with animation, "he will never debase his noble intellect in inebriety. He is too generous to crush the high hopes of his friends; too ambitious to trample all his bright prospects in the dust; too good," she continued, blushing, "to destroy the happiness of those that love him."

"Are they only the weak, the unambitious, the unloved," said Edith, "who are laid low by the fell destroyer, Alcohol? Ah! no; often, Oh! how often, the young, the lovely, the good, fall recklessly into the fatal snares. Look at the foulest blot on our village. Life to him was once all sunshine. My father knew him in his youth as a man of great promise, esteemed and beloved; but did his bright hopes save him from the abyss in which he lies? Oh! Mary, delay not; throw all your good influence around Harry; for alas! I fear you do not realize how heedlessly he is hastening his own destruction."

"I will ponder on what you say," said Mary, thoughtfully, as she rose to accompany her friend to the door.

It was a resplendent evening, and the two friends seated themselves beneath the trees to enjoy for a few moments its beauties. But a few words passed their lips, for the remarks of Edith had made a deep impression on the heart of Mary; they had left a weight there not easily removed; and Edith had no wish to disturb the thoughtful mood that might result in her own and Harry's good.

Well-known, familiar voices came wailed on the still night's air to their ears, in earnest conversation, as two young men passed along the street.

"Clinton, I do realize my situation. It stands with all its attendant horrors, full before me. With what a fearful weight it presses on my soul. But I am 'powerless,' 'fascinated,' 'spell-bound,' 'irretrievably' in the wiles of the tempter. Oh! God! that I should come to this. Clinton, you, the untempted, know not the torture of this longing, this burning, insatiable thirst, which nothing will appease but the accursed wine! God grant you may never know! You say, 'be a man, shake off these horrid fetters.' Clinton, I cannot! I have not power! I am as surely, as fatally drawn as by the hateful rattlesnake; yes, to an object twice as hateful, twice as fearful to my soul."

"Harry," said Clinton, with deep emotion, "I pity you, God knows how much; but do not, do not despair. By all your hopes of time and eternity, do not say you cannot release yourself from these hellish chains. For 'her sake,' rouse yourself, for Mary's sake, who loves you better than life."

"For her sake," said Harry, bitterly, as he struck his clenched hands together; "what might I be but for her. If you, Mary, had uttered but one word to aid me in my good resolve—but no! it was you who placed with your own hands the fatal glass to my lips! It was your finger that pointed out the smooth, deceitful way! you—Oh! God! what am I saying!" he exclaimed, vehemently.

"Clinton, I believe I am mad!"

Mary had heard enough. Those dreadful words fell like burning coals on her writhing heart, and she fell almost lifeless into the arms of Edith.

Oh! the terrible agony of that sleepless night. She felt an awful retribution

awaited her for her sin. That night rose before her like an accusing angel, when she offered the wine-cup to Harry's lips.

"Mary," said he with a smile, as he waved it from him, "I shall never again quaff that dangerous beverage. Help me to be firm in my determination."

The thoughtless girl wet her lips in the sparkling foam, and again proffered it to him. Could he refuse it then? The tempter stood before him, in the form of her he loved. He yielded, he fell. Where was that god-like purpose, earnest of a glorious fruition? Quenched in the foaming nectar.

Oh! she would lay down her life to recall that hour, but, "too late, too late," rung like a death-knell in her ear. Despair fell like a great shadow on her spirit. Alone in the darkness, with her conscience and her God, she plead for forgiveness and for strength. With the morning light came soothing words from Edith, "Even in the eleventh hour there is hope," and a hope, faint and feeble, like the glimmer of a lamp to the shipwrecked mariner, sprang up, that she might yet save him.

With her whole soul she wrought for his salvation, and hope would rise and rise again, on buoyant, silver wings, to fall into utter darkness. Again and again did she promise to risk all in his keeping; if, after a few months probation, he still remained in abstinence; and as often would that cherished promise be unavailing, to keep him from the toils of sin.

Once more he sought her forgiveness, and gained it, he knew for the last time; and valiantly he fought with his insatiable appetite. Eight months passed—the goal was almost won. Their sun of life brightened, and shed a warm glow over their hopeful future. Castles, with golden turrets, gleamed in their imaginations. Glorious visions danced gaily before them. A thousand plans were discussed, that seemed almost accomplished.

Must that radiant sun go down in darkness? the glittering castle sink in clouds? those glorious visions pale in despair?

One evening Mary sat listening eagerly for the welcome sound of his footstep, her fancy wreathing for futurity a chaplet of brilliant gems, when hark! it is his step, but—O, God! it falters, it wavers! "Save, Oh! save me, from this hour," cried Mary, with ashy lip and clasped hands.

He entered, and with unnatural hilarity commenced bantering her on her forlorn appearance. She stood for a moment, bereft of utterance, then with a wild and frantic energy, exclaimed—

"Oh! Harry, 'tis past! my dream of happiness dead, dead! The hope that I have dared to cherish in my heart has recoiled, like a venomous serpent, and poisoned its life springs. Earth has no smile for me, alas! nor Heaven. Leave me, Oh! leave me!"

He stood gazing into her face with a vacant stare, as if not comprehending her vehement words, and then his awful situation came rushing upon him with the force of a thunderbolt. Overcome with wine, passion and grief, he caught her hand in his iron grasp, and showered on her head the most dreadful reproaches. He placed his promise of happiness, in time and eternity, in the scale against her cruel temptation. He cast the wreck of all his prospects, his principles, his love, on her hands, and left forever, with a curse on his lips.

He left his native State and became a wanderer. Little did she hear of him, but that little was ever the same, onward and downward, till at last she lost all trace of his existence.

Had life one gleam for her? Not one. She cared not to live, she dared not to die; but the tide of misery surged on and on, and enveloped her in the cold, dark waves of despair. Years passed, and she moved on, her eye robbed of its light, her step of its elasticity, aimless, without a joy, unable to catch one glance of the white-winged dove of Peace; when the wailing of thousands in the land roused her from her lethargy; a cry to "come over and help us," a cry for assistance in the battle against the demon Alcohol.

Then her heart beat with new life, and she vowed herself a champion to fight with the Philistine. Her whole soul was arrayed in this battle of the Lord's, and he blessed her efforts. Though life's pleasures had all drooped and faded, yet she had a holy purpose for which to live and struggle, a glorious end to gain, and she rested trustfully on his all-saving arm.

Ten years had "wheeled their circling flight," and Mary was staying with friends in a far distant State. One evening, as twilight was stealing o'er the winter landscape, her friend, Frank Patton, entered the room where she was seated, and said, "Cousin Mary, will you go out to night? There is to be a Temperance lecture, in St. James, delivered by Mr. ——— well, I have forgotten his name, but somebody, they say, very eloquent."

"I shall be happy to hear him," replied Mary, as she rose and gazed from the window. She was sad, for it was the anniversary of the two well remembered partings, and her heart was full of the past. Tears stood in her eyes, as she looked up to the stars that were fast appearing in the dark firmament; their long rays came down and made those tears a part of their effulgence.

It had been raining, and the pure drops had congealed in a million gems of every hue upon the trees, that swayed and cracked in the light wind. A shower of diamonds came rustling down at every motion, and lay strewn on the snow-clad earth. Every post, fence and wall was tasselled with brilliants, and even the dark buildings of the great city were roofed with silver.

As they threaded their way to the entrance of the church, Mary lifted a prayer of thankfulness to the Author of the beautiful, that she was still able to worship him in his works.

When she entered it was nearly filled. A flood of light danced and glittered on the walls, and threw long, grotesque shadows among the dim arches, and flashed back in rainbow hues from the gorgeously stained windows. A hum of voices mingled with the musical tinkle of the pendants, that trembled on the great chandeliers, as foot after foot sped up the long aisles.

Scarcely noticing the assemblage around her, Mary seated herself, absorbed in a deep reverie of the past. A few moments, and then the voices were hushed and silence reigned. The speaker had risen.

His first words, clear and deep-toned, fell with electrifying power, as he proclaimed himself devoted, heart and soul, to the cause for which he labored. *That voice.* Well might Mary Ellis gasp for breath; well might cheek, lip and brow turn to the hue of death. That voice had last fallen in a curse upon her ear. No one observed her agony. They were spell-bound by the flood of eloquence that rolled over them. One moment a shout from a thousand tongues rent the air, and floated away among the high arches; the next, the stillness of death pervaded that vast assembly. Hour after hour flew by, and they heeded it not. Their gaze riveted on that speaking eye, they drank in every word as a delicious draught, though to many, sharper than a two-edged sword.

He paused a moment, then recommenced in a low voice, whose mournful cadence thrilled on every hearer.

"I feel it my painful duty, yet still a duty I owe to this glorious cause and the young, whose interests are very dear to me, though it almost wrings the life-blood from my heart to relate to you a portion of my life; for," said he, in an agitated voice, "I was not once what you now see me," and then he told, in fire-touched language, what we already know.

Of Mary, he spoke tenderly, Oh! how tenderly, of her loveliness, her virtues; "but she," said he, while tears sparkled in his soul-lit eyes, as he looked on the sad, sweet faces before him, "my young friends, raised the poisoned chalice to my lips, and bid me taste; thoughtlessly, little dreaming she was plunging a dagger in her own bosom, sowing seed that would waste all the sweet flowers of affection. Oh! how she suffered. Too late she sought to redeem her error; too late! too late! She agonized to save me. Life was to her no more than the dying zephyr, if, by its sacrifice, she should snatch me from the abyss to which I was fast hastening; but I trampled on all those sweet blossoms of her love, and because she refused to link her fate with mine, a foul wretch, fiend that I was, I cursed her to her face. Oh! forgive me," said he, lifting his eyes to heaven; "I never can forgive myself."

"Tortured with remorse, I drank deeper and deeper, and with rapid strides approached nearer and nearer the unfathomable gulf, from which there is no escape. Not a ray of light shone down